bringing Jazz

MAXWELL BODENHEIM

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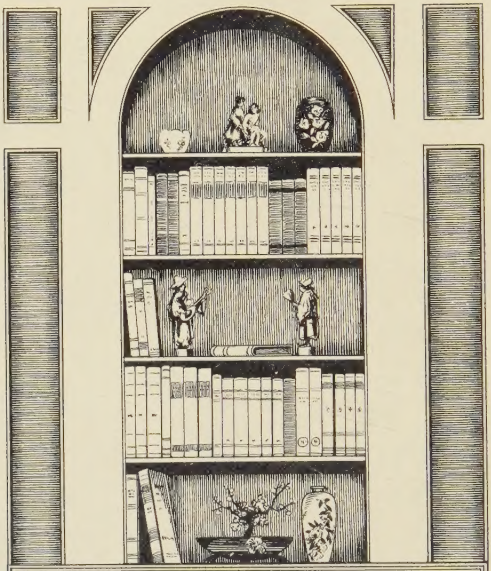

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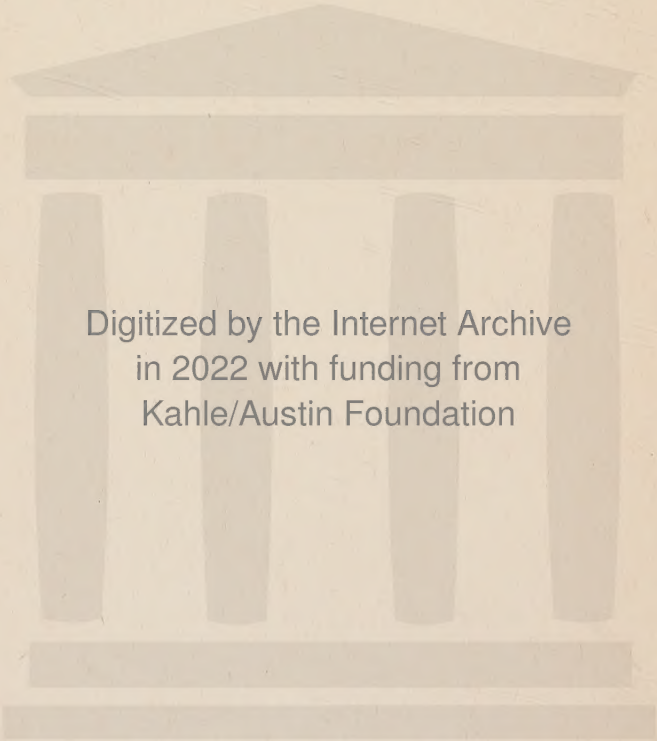
BRINGING JAZZ!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BRINGING JAZZ!

MAXWELL BODENHEIM

MCMXXX
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TO
A BROBDIGNAGIAN ELF
NAMED WUMS

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BRINGING JAZZ!

These poems were written to be set to music, and a jazz-composer is earnestly invited.

GREENWICH VILLAGE
JAZZ I

THE weather is fine in Montana—
Though afternoons sometimes get hot—
But it would be a misplaced Hosanna
To exclaim that the Village does not!
The lad who made love to Montana,
Although he had never been there,
Can be seen still extracting sweet manna
From the West of a wild, Village chair.

But look at the next noisy table—
Two men from New York's Daily Cruise.
Though they sneer at a crude Village fable,
They always come down there for booze.
And here's a reporter with roses
Imbedded on each of her cheeks.
They are quite as unreal as the poses
She extracts from a Village that "reeks."
Well, here is a playwright from Broadway,
Who once was a newspaper bird.
When he starts to converse in an awed way
No one near him can get in a word!
And here's one who's making a fade-out:
He stages burlesques of the past.
When the royalties need not be paid out
You can rake in your money quite fast.
Ah, yes, we neglected to mention
The darling who loses his frocks
When he takes his rejected intention
And returns to the wearing of socks.
She's called an Albanian "gypsy,"
With earrings and gaudiest clothes,
But, alas, when the lady gets tipsy
She talks just like the shape of her nose.
He's lord of a Village speak-easy

And customers call him Sol Black.
When you drink down his scotch you get queasy
And you dream that you'll ride in a hack.
Ah, here's Village Poet Two-Forty,
Who sings of a pale, Chinese moon.
His appearance is ruggèd and sporty,
And somehow it conflicts with his tune.
But look—a bald-headed composer,
Who drinks from an ambergris vial.
He was robbed of a song by a poser,
But the case never comes up for trial.
The maiden beside him is wispy
And somehow her face looks like soap
When it's carved into small outlines crispy
And imbued with a sexual hope.
Her comrade is pudgy and blowy,
With eyes that incessantly flirt.
Though she knows that her bare legs are showy,
She must pull down her eighteen-inch skirt.
The lady beside her is twenty,
With spangles and angles of arms.
She recites dripping verses with plenty
Of remarks on her spasmodic charms.
Ah, here are two lads who find pillage
In a green magazine loud and terse.

Though the editor jeers at the Village,
He employs it to further his purse.
She rambles around until morning
With penniless, wistful-eyed minks,
Who pretend that her verse is adorning
And induce her to pay for the drinks.
The girl at her side has a penchant
For nibbling from Schnitzler and Shaw.
Though her language is never quite trenchant,
She can fill Village lowbrows with awe.
Prepare for a shock—hold your seats, boys—
A millionaire-poet who's wise!—
Yes, the line-up extends to the street, boys,
And they're begging with tears in their eyes.
Now here's an i n c r e d i b l e stripling—
This girl doesn't claim she can write!—
But, alas, she begins to say Kipling
In a thick voice whenever she's tight.
This lady must hold a recital—
She does book-reviews for the Post.
Every author is breathlessly vital
When he dwindles his mind to a ghost.
Now here's a young woman who's priggish
And lifts up her chin till it creaks,
Because gentlemen always get piggish

When they gaze at her ravishing . . . cheeks.
These people and all their boot-lickers
Are n o t tawdry posers, or knaves.
No, they're only a gang of rag-pickers
Making bluffs on the way to their graves!

UNDERWORLD
JAZZ I

ZELDA AND DANNY
A modern Frankie And Johnny song

NOW they called it Fron-Ton Club—
Just a gin and gyppy game.
What a poison-water tub!
Twice a year it changed its name.

Ten and Fifteen chauffeurs' God—
Doorman wearing golden braid—
Made them pay high for his nod,
If they wanted Fron-Ton trade.

Dog-faced waiters unrefined
When the tip was only air:
Hog-faced "owner" just a blind
For a gambling millionaire.

Smeared up girlies paid to dance
With the fat and ugly males:
Imitating moist romance,
Barely keeping out of jails.

Craven girls with raven hearts
Never touched by men's embrace,
Truckling down to sleek upstarts:
Kicking suckers in the face.

Zelda Murray was a blonde
Working in the Fron-Ton hole.
Green eyes like a torn-up frond
Fallen from a rustic soul.

Zelda's heart was bitter-sweet—
Rancid tricks of every shape
Wedded to a sugar-heat
Longing for a soft escape!

Zelda tried to play her game
Not too hard and not too warm:
Smiling much and keeping tame
Johnnies in a grasping swarm.

Zelda loved a hard-shelled man—
Danny Felder was his tag.
Gave her heart-breath all to Dan,
Like a blown-up baby's bag.

Loved his curses, loved his gall
Followed by a begging kiss.
When he danced out, black and tall,
He could make her heart-beats miss!

Danny was a poker-shark,
Hoofing when his luck ran dry.
Wasn't white and wasn't dark—
Just a man with one gray sigh.

Danny loved her quiet line
When his hands became too rough.
Wouldn't squawk and couldn't whine—
She was made of sterling stuff!

Then one night they pulled a scrap
When she let a millionaire
Drag her down upon his lap,
Rubbing kisses on her hair.

She said: "Well, what can I do—
Use a pair of handcuffs, Dan?
If it makes you feel so blue,
Take me from this garbage-can!"

Danny made an old mistake—
Thought that she was taunting him—
And he dragged his cold heart-ache
Out into the morning dim.

Two nights fled, and Danny stayed
In a dive called "Sunny-Side,"
Dancing with a black-haired maid
Just to ease his smarting pride.

On the third night Zelda sat,
Moping in a gray-cold void:
Voices near her sounded flat,
Reading from a pink tabloid:

" 'Felder's got . . . a brunette hot' " —
"Look at Wallace Ginsmell's joke!"—
" 'Filled with smiles and you-know-what.
. Who's the blonde whose heart he broke?' "

Zelda's breast grew lame and weak,
Sniveled like a six-year-old:
All the blood ran from her cheek—
'It was true—he'd left her cold!'

That night Zelda found her room,
Maudlin-drunk and bleary-eyed:
With a dazed and swollen gloom,
Drank a dose of cyanide.

On the next morn, feeling black,
Danny stood beside her bed,
Touched her hand . . . and staggered back—
Little Zelda's heart was dead.

Sing a song of nervy men
Wringing scandals out of sex:
Earning gold with a muddy pen—
Often making human wrecks.

Sing a song of modern spies
Writing with a key-hole sneer,
Swelling motes and telling lies
With a wise and knowing leer.

UNDERWORLD
JAZZ II

CRACK!—another revolver—
Little Napoleon killed his fifteenth man.
Whack!—he tried hard to solve her,
But when he failed he had to smack her pan.
"Say . . . we'll slip him the leather"—
Freddy the Goat could sling a nasty slang.
He . . . was wondering whether
He could survive unless he killed his gang.

He . . . said: "Here's where I takes in!"—
Murdered the man and then collected cash.
He . . . was colder than snake-skin—
Shot his own daughter when she got too rash.
Look!—another big banner—
'Rattling The Cup Upon Chicago's Life.'
What . . . a bold tattling manner—
'Mrs. Traponi slapped the Mayor's wife.'
Cole . . . was born in December—
Claiming that Hildy stole his watch for pelf—
But . . . he did not remember
That he had failed to buy the watch himself!
Here . . . is Carlo Scollini—
Threw sixteen bombs and made his brother pay.
He . . . could scare Mussolini—
How he was born his mother couldn't say.
Scowling like typhoid fever,
Tennessee Red knocks hoboes left and right.
Then . . . this noble deceiver
Gives up his life to keep a maiden white.
Read . . . what happened when Frankie
Stuffed her chemise within the keg and fled.
When . . . they drank they were cranky—
Dye in the beer-foam made them all see red.

Bang . . . Crash . . . Zowie . . . Groans—
Listen to the Literary Underworld!
Life . . . in . . . movie . . . tones—
Ravages of action when the plot's unfurled.
No . . . it . . . isn't . . . real . . .
And you couldn't say that it was fantasy.
Just . . . one . . . mixed-up . . . spiel—
Mrs. Punch and Mr. Judy can't agree.

very slowly

UNDERWORLD
JAZZ III

LOUIE was . . . an East Side rat,
Turned his little mind into a nickel gat,
Burned his mind . . . and made it spit
Little slugs and powder in a blinding fit.
Louie's heart . . . was cold and slow,
Never felt the smallest touch of vertigo,
But it held . . . a strange, warm spot—
Slimsy buds of shame and fear that would not rot.

Even Blue . . . Beard must have felt
Goblins made of grief and nausea when he knelt
Some dark night . . . beside a child
With its little face all tortured and defiled.
Louie could . . . betray his frail,
Beat her till she bled and put her up for sale:
He could shoot . . . his closest friend—
Send a ton of roses for the funeral-end.
But he loved . . . his only son,
Loved him with a sodden hush that couldn't run:
Worried stabs . . . within his breast
Cut away the clamminess and gave no rest.
Years ago . . . the mother died,
And the child held all the vengeance of her pride—
Louie's mouth . . . a butcher's slit
Trapped below the black eyes of a frightened chit!
Louie stared . . . upon this son,
Saw a woman's face and his burned down to one!
Had to love . . . his own thick lips
Caught below a pair of eyes like frozen whips.
Kept his son . . . at a sister's house,
Tiptoed up to see him, like a chastised mouse.
Brought him toys . . . fine clothes and ties,
Stroked him with his fingers silent lullabies.

Louie ruled . . . on Hyman Street
Where his gang spread venom with its fists and feet.
New men came . . . sold poison-juice
Right on Louie's block, and baby!—hell broke loose.
Two men died . . . and then one day
Rivals cornered Louie in his own hallway.
Just as each . . . one pulled his gun
Gusts of laughter rose and out ran Louie's son!
Louie turned . . . his back and then
Threw the boy inside before he faced his men.
When he turned . . . he wrote his fate—
Bullets plowed his spine and left a splintered hate.
Spare a song . . . for Louie Kohn,
Sing the notes one shade above a whisper meek.
"Men have souls . . . that stand alone,
Waiting for a moment when the flesh grows weak."

FUTURISTIC JAZZ

SMILAX music . . . high C buds
Climbing up from where the big drum thuds,
Climbing into . . . flappers' souls,
Twining life around the sleepy doles.
Whisky music . . . spilled from flutes,
Making drunkards out of sober youths,
Making hoodlums . . . slinky fops
Spin together like a row of tops!

Everybody's . . . getting wet—
Too much claret from the old cornet
Flicking faces . . . red with dew,
Making hearts all dripping and askew.
Mary's legs have . . . lost their bones.
Now they're nothing but a French-horn's groans.
Mary's breasts have . . . lost their skin—
Opened up to let a bass-drum in.
Mary's brains are . . . in her feet,
Raising thoughts to give her toes a treat.
Mary's lips are . . . curving out—
Found a saxophone and lost their pout.
Mary's dress is . . . falling down—
Soul's too light to wear a heavy gown.
Mary's eyes are . . . blazing jets
Filled with sparks from sixty clarinets.
Mary's cheeks are . . . soft and thin—
Damask sounds caught from a violin.
Good-by, morals . . . so long, fears—
Everybody's crazy when the music leers.
Even Mother Grundy grins,
Lifts her dress an inch and turns the safety-pins! *slowly*

BRINGING JAZZ

Odd-numbered lines spoken slowly:
even-numbered ones quickly

LAST night I had an oboe dream—
Whistlers in a box-car madness bringing jazz.
Their faces stormed in a hobo-gleam,
Blinding all the grinding wheels and singing jazz.
The box-car gloried in its dirt—
Just a hallelujah made of chanting mud.
And one old bum opened up his shirt,
Showing wounds of music in his ranting blood.

The hoboes sang with scorching notes
Burning up the pain into a gale of jazz,
While sadness poured in their shaking throats,
Like a molten bugle in a wail of jazz.
The rails were jails for death and rust—
Holding up the cruel, dark blue speed of jazz—
But life still stirred underneath their crust—
Little hums and clicks brought by the need of jazz.
Within the box-car, hoboes leaped—
Fatalists and pagans in a carefree trap—
And when they sang of hungers reaped,
Bread and wine of sound came from a dark god's lap!
The hoboes made a fox-trot blaze—
Scorning women, gliding in a sexless dance—
And on their coats of raggèd baize
Ghosts of orchids fluttered down and looked askance!
The jungle sent a moan of sound—
Made it blend into an oath of northern grime.
A music came, flaring and profound,
Flayed with rapture half repelled and half sublime.
And then I saw the dream's dark spring—
Hurricanes of jazz born from the underworld.
"Saint Louie Gal with a diamond ring"
Danced with mobs of hoboes while the thunder swirled!

JAZZ DELIRIUM

THERE'S a boulder on my shoulder
And I'll throw it to the sky.
Midnight, fold me in
With a black cloud for a skin!

There's a twister in my sister
And it blows her ten miles high.
She is tango-pinned
To the gliding of the wind.

There's a wing numb in my kingdom,
But the drumsticks make it move,
And it beats a call
On a soul-drum blue and tall.

He's a varlet turning scarlet
As he leaves his snarling groove.
Gangster, hatred slips
When the flute-notes reach your lips!

She's a shop-girl in a top-whirl
And her soul's a tambourine.
Dance, girl, while you test
New cadenzas in your breast!

When a crow's push in a rose-bush
Grinds a discord hard and mean,
Jazz-love, with a grin,
Draws a music from its din!

Mama, take your wincing, mincing,
Little soul and make it nude.
No one keeps his clothes
When an old red cyclone blows!

Papa, tear your scurvy derby
And forget that you were lewd.
When your dull heart begs
Put a trombone in your legs!

When a rain-hug melts a pain-shrug
With a tom-tom to romance,
Sing like a new-born calf
And you'll make Beethoven laugh!

When a lorgnette meets a cornet,
Well, it never has a chance!
Pale snobs yield to throbs
While the raging fiddle bobs.

There's a whisky spilling frisky
In the cup of Susan's lips.
No more headaches strong,
For it's just a drunken song!

Turn a preacher to a screecher
With a God whose clean mouth grips
Saxophones with their tones
Singing no to prudish crones!

JAZZ KALEIDOSCOPE

IT takes a good, old-fashioned midnight hell
To make a dark man twist his hips.
He'll make your heart-beats swell until they yell
And burn a jazz-song on your lips!
You can't go wrong when mama shakes her legs
And makes a dead man leave his grave!
She's got a mango-smile and when she begs
She'd make an old jack-rabbit brave!

You need a dark brown sister stepping wild,
You need a dark brown stack of joy.
She'll put a moony, loony, baboon-child
Right in your blood and marrow, boy!
Come on and bend your knees until they crouch
Just like a tiger going south.
And when you get down to that jungle-couch
You'll find a dark-skinned baby's mouth!...
Bones, roll on that floor.
Bones, make it once more!
Bones, seven's my score—
My sugar needs a diamond ring.
Bones, here's where we ride!
Bones, come on and slide.
Bones, keep on my side—
I've got to make my sugar sing.
S p o t s, phoebe for me!
S p o t s, bring in that V.
S p o t s, one two-and-three!—
I've got a private, highbrown date.
S p o t s, ten's not a heap.
S p o t s, box-cars are cheap.
S p o t s, read 'em and weep!——
She won't be there if I'm too late!

Dice, love me to-night.
Dice, don't make me fight.
Dice, please treat me right— *last line slow*
I need just one more black-eyed eight!..

Oh Mamie Lou, you're squeezing
Blood-roses... in my breast,
Blood-moanings... and teasing
Blood-whispers... I can't rest!
Oh Mamie Lou, your eyes are
Black panthers... in soft dens,
Black soul-cries... and night's scar...
Black heart-stirs... in soft fens...

quickly

But now she's made me free...
With kisses, moon-juice drops...
My blood's a tossing sea...
I hope she never stops!—

Mamie Lou, Oh Mamie Lou, you're life's breath
to me!...

The musical-comedy touch, somewhat connected with "The Memphis Blues"

I heard a man, yelling on a soap-box to-night.
He had a plan... in his shout—
"Workers, rise... and drive the grafters out!

Oh, use your heads and fight—
Chase the liars out of sight!"

But then a man . . . came and dragged another soap-box,
And how he screamed, shook his fist.
"That first man . . . he's just a socialist!
They'll keep you breaking rocks
Till you're all one Communist!"

Oh, things looked bad . . . but another babe climbed a tree,
And how that lad . . . raised his cries—
"Those two guys . . . they're filling you with lies!
Oh Workers, you'll be free
When you come to Anarchy!"

The puzzled crowd . . . wondered who would be
the next man,
Until a loud . . . copper cried:
"Can that bull . . . or else you'll take a ride!"
Each speaker dropped his pan—
Baby, how those three men ran!

The copper turned . . . bowing low to three other men,
And on their breasts . . . he could see:
"Democrats . . . Progressives, G. O. P."

"We'll raid that robbers' den,
We'll throw them in the pen,
But, we don't know exactly when!" . . .

Listen, you palm-scratchers,
Lippy baby-snatchers—
Stay 'way from mah Harlem chippy, 'less ah get mad!
Pawned my skin to catch her,
Now I'm gonna latch her
In mah flat and drink her heart—ah need her bad!
Happy-dust can make me bust
A two-inch pine:
Scrappy-juice can turn me loose
And burn mah spine.
Royal-flush can make me hush
Down to mah toes:
Pizen-gin can walk right in
And steal mah clothes,
But when mah brown stamper
Ses come on an' vamp her—
Baby, ah's a manglin' blazin' low-down lad. . . . *slowly very slowly*

Come on, niggahs, swing your feet!
Dat Ku Klux Klan done lit its torch!
Don' wait, bruddahs—lift your meat!

They're out to make us black men scorch!
Some white driftah jumped a chile
An' hopped a side-door Pullman-train.
Cain't ketch him so we's to bile—
Oh, Lawd please take us from our pain.

White man saw a niggah crew
Jes' snoopin' round where she reclined.
Might have bin a white one too—
There's times when white men's color-blind!...
Sing it sad and sing it low:
They dragged mah boy out fum dat hay.
Struck him down an' burned him slow,
But we'll get even some sweet day... *slowly*

quickly

Harlem slims... Bronx flips,
Greenpoint trims... Brooklyn gyps—
You're all the same upon that floor!
Crazy sighs... loose arms,
Hips and thighs... fire-alarms—
You lose your shame and cry for more!
Mud-pie hearts... snippy tongues,
Slangy tarts... steam-blast lungs—
The music makes you wild and clean.

Jungle shrieks . . . Brass roars,
Macaw streaks . . . swampy shores—
A savage can't stay small and mean.
Cornet loves . . . squawking lusts,
Trombone shoves . . . deep distrusts,
They strip and wound your silky flesh.
Ugly rooms . . . clicking keys,
Subway glooms . . . tired knees,
They're gone and life is born afresh.
Eager brutes . . . hug you tight.
Each one shoots . . . out of sight—
He's just a prop on which you lean.

more slowly

One o'clock . . . music stops.
Silent shock . . . prosy flops—
Their hearts are once more crass and rough.
"Change your line" . . . "Aw, keep still!
Not for mine . . . You're a pill!"—
The jungle-moon's shrunk down to a powder puff . . .

very slowly

Chicago's nothing but a brawl . . .
Where suicides are hard and tall . . .
And Lust cleans its nose on a dirty shawl.
But when the fight and death and slobber fall,
Another poet-boy is born!

more slowly

Chicago's freight-yards vomit smoke...
Where brakemen yell and curse their yoke...
And Death hides his head in the engine's croak.
But in the grinding, pounding, screeching joke
Great music waits and blows its horn!

more slowly

Venice canals are filled with slime...
London's East End is wracked with grime...
Paris holds dirt made hard by time.
But in the darkness one truth stands forth strong—
It takes a lot of dirt to make a song!

slowly

CHICAGO
JAZZ I

CHICAGO'S soul is a child and a hag
Sitting on a keg of beer,
And when they drink they begin to brag,
Hugging close to hide their fear.
Chicago's soul is a shoveling man
Cursing with a muddy smile,
And while he works, his smoke-eyes plan
Fortunes in a ruddy pile.

Chicago's soul is a blind steel-mill chap
Yearning in a furnace strife,
And when he shouts and his steel hands clap,
Robots almost come to life!
Chicago's soul is a black railroad boss
With his nerves a maze of tracks,
And when his smoke-hearts rave and toss
Human hearts must bend their backs!
Chicago's soul is a breakwater lake
Sullen as a minor king,
But when he sleeps, Indian Spirits take
Whispers on a sandy ring.
Chicago's soul is a State Street remorse
Tearing memories apart.
It sighs for times when a creepy horse
Pulled its little street-car heart.
Chicago's soul is a gangsters' parade—
Numbness in a livid gash—
And when they play a dark charade,
Craftiness and venom clash.
Chicago's soul is a bleak, mile-long pier—
Just a stiff and ugly worm.
But when the night spreads a golden leer,
Little hints of beauty squirm!
Chicago's soul is a hard, lake-front park

Flatter than a dead man's sight,
But in the dark it grows less stark—
Glints of poems brought by night.
Chicago's soul is a groan and a squeal
Caught within a Stock-Yards hate,
But from the graves where nightmares kneel,
Life still rises, wild and straight!
Chicago's soul shades can never quite lodge
In the space where walls abound,
For soul shades dodge through an old hodge-podge—
Wrangling lies of sight and sound!

CHICAGO
JAZZ II

WHEN a State Street scandal
Bangs and clangs,
Then a midnight vandal
Makes harangues
With a car-gong, wheel-strong, husky spleen
Against the sky's indifferent sheen.

When an Irish copper
Tells a bo

In a voice improper:
"Come on—blow!"
Sneaky Clark Street, Shark Street, shows its hair,
Like ill-will stripped to underwear.

Let a negro strutter
Fall down dead.
Let a negress mutter
"Slip him lead"—
Fifty-First Street, Thirst Street's heart-beats dream
Within a whisky-bottle's scream.

In the Wooded Island—
Jackson Park—
Where a heart-squeezed Sigh-Land
Takes the dark,
Little fop-churls, shop-girls, press their limbs
Beneath a million leafy whims.

When a Lake Shore sleekness
Black with cars
Meets an old sky meekness
Thronged with stars,
Then a prose-song flows long underneath
The noise upon a soulless street!

Here's a street-car crawling
With a curse
At a truck that's stalling
Like a hearse—
Oh, the raucous, claw-rush, loony crew
Of hate on Wabash Avenue!

When the whaleback's whistles
Cleave the lake,
While the steel-load bristles
With an ache,
There's a lurching, smirching giant-fear
Below the smoke-stack's belching smear.

When the row-boats dimple
Park lagoons
And the oars make simple
Bars on moons,
Then a cry from sly-dumb throngs of lips
Kills all the day-time's slaving trips!

Make a music squander
Hurried throats,
While the harsh notes wander—
Flurried motes—
Oh, the scorns and horns and drummings-strain
Chicago's daffy, laughy pain!

COME ON, JAZZ

NORTH wind, south wind, east wind, west,
It takes the sound of saxophones to make you one.
Moonlight, sunlight, electric light, and stars,
It takes a flute to bring you close and make you run.
Pagan, scholar, Christian, fool,
We'll grunt a trombone-armistice and shake your feet.
What are mind, and heart, and soul,
Except a crowd of jazzers on an old, cold street!

126492

Cornet, fiddle, trap-drum, horn,
You make a conflagration, within the congegation
Of hips and toes.
You kill the dull oration, the hide-and-seek relation
Of day-time blows.

You take a tattling maiden
And make her still.
She keeps a swaying secret
Beyond her swill.
You fall upon a preacher
And make him warm.
He brings the Songs Of Solomon
A fox-trot storm.
You find a little gangster
And make him tall.
He finds a better gun-bark
In the drummer's call.
You take the sores of mankind
And make them nil.
The morning brings them back
But never quite so ill.
Oh, Schumann and Beethoven
Would love your child,
For only grave uniqueness

Can afford to be wild.
The men who hate your clamors
Have sold their life
To dignified æsthetics
And a bundled wife!

Dreamer, butcher, infant, priest,
Oh, take an old insanity and make it new.
Make it naked, twisting, shrill,
And fly beyond the no and yes of false and true.
Praise your shoulders,
Raise them high.
There is no morality
Within the sky!

GREENWICH VILLAGE JAZZ II

HE'S a minstrel in a moon-cage
Playing tag with middle-age,
But late every night
His heart-beats fight
With a dying jester's rage!

With his ukulele plinking—
A cigar-box under string—

He turns out the light,
Mutters: "Good Night,"
And commands his pain to sing.

Then he leaves his paltry hall-room
And forgets his minor doom.
In tea-rooms and caves
His heart behaves
Like a sky-lark in a tomb!

But his heart is never pride-slain
And he will not sing for gain.
When coaxings are made,
Smilings are paid,
Then he deigns to entertain.

Straining for each brittle high-note,
Naughty nonsense clears his throat.
Indelicate maids,
Tropical jades,
Cleopatra in her boat.

Yes, the words are trite and silly,
But they make his frail soul free.
Illusions in pawn
Bought by the dawn
Of a box upon his knee!

Like a pale, embarrassed elf,
Mary sold her fluffy pinks.
Then her heart . . . hid itself
And became a scuffling minx.

With her black hair primly bobbed
And her lips unmoving fears,
Mary looked . . . dimly robbed
Of her laughter and her tears.

Oh, she spied her soul each night
In a gin-glass bubble's death,
While her smile . . . cold and slight,
Found a graveyard in her breath!

Mary had a poet's sight
In the light-webs of her eyes,
But her mind . . . would not fight
For a poet's rending cries.

Save a song for Mary Fair
With clairvoyance on her head,
Staring at . . . a bluebird pair
Never quite alive or dead.

very slowly

BRONX
JAZZ I

TESSIE GOLDBERG had a smile like dollars
In love with scholars
In starched white collars
And silk shirts.

Tessie fell for dilettantes and glib men
Who spoke of Ibsen
And rhymed their fibs when
They saw skirts.

But she hated raggy coats and cart-ties.
She wanted art-sighs
In clothes of smart size
And creased pants.

And she longed for men whose heads were hat-checks
That led to fat checks
For tales of flat sex
And love cants.

She would say: "I don't like your vibrations
And indications
Of Kosher rations
For free-verse.

I want men whose art is plain and knowing,
With money flowing,
So please be going,
And don't curse!"

She was fond of stale words like "celerity"
And "much temerity,"
"Prove your sincerity"—
Refined pose.

And she thought that culture was a trinket,
A flashy ring set
Just like a wing-jet
Of rainbows.

She was plump where plumpness made a blunder
And fell asunder
To legs whose plunder
Was slender.

And her face was like a pudgy rabbit
Whose smudgy habit
Lead to a Babbitt—
A spender.

Tessie met a bluffer in a ball-room
Fresh from a hall-room
A hole of small gloom
And soiled wash.

In his "diamond-ring" and new tuxedo
He looked Club Lido
With much libido
On boiled squash.

He was tall with pasted hair and thirty
Years on his flirty
Face filled with dirty
Suggestions.

When she said that art was pure and fetching,
He spoke of etching
And canvas-stretching—
Deep questions.

And he treated Tennyson and Shakespeare
Like splendid cakes near
The place where aches fear
Green colic.

Yet between his arty talks he boasted:
'At Palm Beach roasted,'
And friends who toasted—
Keen frolic.

And he spoke of money as a trifle,
With banks to rifle
And yawns to stifle—
Droll boredom.

Tessie said: "I hope you can excuse me.
Your thoughts enthuse me,
But you abuse me—
I'm so dumb."

Then he swore that Tessie was artistic
And strongly mystic
But masochistic
In self-doubts.

She had only spoken to be flattered
By one who mattered
And somehow shattered
Her young louts.

And she said: "Your kind sophistication
Fills my low station
With high elation—
I'm blessed, sir."

But the language which she thought so fancy
Grew weak and trancy
When this smooth pansy
Caressed her.

After many "don'ts" and "I'm afraid, dear,"
Her "virtue" strayed, dear,
While nerve-harps played, dear—
"My darling."

Then he lost his "poetry" and glossing
And took to bossing
With crude head-tossing
And snarling.

First her wounded rage tried to abolish
Love and demolish
The man whose "polish"
Had lured her.

But her snobbish mind stroked all the cankers
And said that bankers
Were proud first-rankers,
And cured her.

And when his remarks flew back to Shelley
And Tintorelli,
Her soul was jelly
In his hands.

Then one day she rode to Coney Island,
That phoney Cry-Land
Whose heart is dry sand
And brass bands.

There she saw her lover selling wrappers
To giggling flappers
And derby scrappers,
With hoarse yells.

Did she feel the first pangs of a cynic,
Or build a clinic
Where rays actinic
Bring false cheer?

No, she found that "art-cries" could not save her
Nor even crave her,
While money gave her
A slight sneer.

And her scorn within found no believers,
Though mental fevers
Swung mighty cleavers
And hissed him.

Then with rueful smiles she walked up to him
And looked right through him
With eyes that slew him...
And kissed him!

BRONX
JAZZ II

Odd stanzas spoken slowly:
even ones quickly

OH, Oh, Sophie,
Rub your diamond trophy
Till your stunted heart-days
Break into rays.

Break into rays then,
Sharper than sun,
Filling your heart when
Working days stun.

Dark, sleek baby,
You're engaged to Abie
And the diamond glints pile
Hints of his smile.

Trashy and jazzy,
Broken-glass grin:
Teeth flashing razzy,
Slang-chortling din.

Stand in hallways
With your torment always
Glued upon the hall-door,
Steps on the floor.

Steps like dull hammers
Striking your hugs:
Privacy stammers
Frail on hall-rugs.

Oh, Oh, Sophie,
When you're feeling loafy,
Clicking keys and straight back
Make your soul black.

Empty dictation—
"We beg to state"—
Brings indignation
Veging on hate.

Warm moroseness
In the subway's closeness
Makes your body borrow
Thoughts crazy-low.

Thoughts crazy-yelping
For a nude strength
Windy-straight, helping
Fields of green length.

Raise your plain laugh
When you mix with riff-raff—
Girls with stabbing catries,
Men who tell lies.

Take all their babble,
Rob it of pain.
Laugh at a rabble
Weakly insane.

When your Auntie
Raves in G andante,
Snicker when her tones grate:
"Dun't get back late!"

Slip in at four then,
Kissed out and weak.
Break from the pigs'-pen
Guzzling and meek!

Sophie, fox-trot,
Glide out till your veins rot.
In a dollar ball-room
Charleston with doom!

Make a despotic
Black-bottom twist
And an erotic
Musical fist!

Lose your slaving,
Yellow bills' engraving,
Leap out to a drum-beat—
Wild arms and feet.

Smash your brown jail-walls,
Night after night.
Jeer at those pale calls,
Wrongness and right!

STREET-LEVEL JAZZ

EIGHTEEN nickels and a rusty, old dime
Slap the scarred mahogany and lead to crime.
Eighteen nickels and a gallon of booze
Bury papa's heart-beats in a soft, black ooze.
Come on, dollar-bill, I'm feeling red—
Jump and stagger till I find a swampy bed.
Slip in, Blues, I'm going to make you loud
Till I spread my sugar on a dark, brown shroud.

Listen, babe, I've got to fly south-east,
Nothing on and happy on a cake of yeast!
Pay me, friend, I'm spreading five out black.
Kiss your mean-eyed pain and buy another stack.
Fret my bones!—you're bluffing on ace-high?
Take your old bandanna out and start to cry.
Twist my lip!—she stole your diamond-pin?
Charge it up to laughy-gin and stay right in!
Rip my thigh!—you took a double-cross?
Say it with banana-spiels and trip that boss!
Look out, girl, I've sold my last bouquet—
Keep your eyes on papa's face or start to pray.
Go 'way, love, you're like a forty-four.
Riddled now with bullet-holes—I can't take more.
Aw, now, love, I never meant that line.
Every man's a hairy baby when you shine.
Hug me, night, you've got a bughouse sigh.
Morning scrapes me cold, but y o u ' r e a velvet lie.
Slug me, night, and give me big-boy dreams—
Stepping on the air and full of lowdown schemes.
What is life except a chance to bluff,
Hiding all the dirty sores where days got rough?
Take it fast and twirl a nasty lip.
All you get is toe and boot-heel when you slip . . .

I've got the dark, stark, long-nailed blues:
I've got an old, black screamy mood.
My heart's a room with nasty news
Enough to make an angel brood.
I'll take a long, deep, raspy breath
And walk right down those railroad-ties.
But when I keep my date with death
He'll find a straight look in my eyes!

FINIS

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